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ENGLISH AND THE INTERPRETATION OF THE ASIAN WORLD.

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THE AUTHOR POINTS OUT THE PROBLEMS INHERENT IN USING ENGLISH AS AN INTER-ETHNIC MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION AND INSTRUCTION IN THE PHILIPPINES AND THE VARIOUS COUNTRIES THROUGHOUT ASIA. UNESCO'S PROJECTION OF LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN ASIA ANTICIPATES A STEADY AND FIRM EMPHASIS ON NATIONAL LANGUAGES, WITH SECONDARY INTERESTS IN THE WORLD LANGUAGE (THIS BEING, GENERALLY SPEAKING, ENGLISH). UNESCO ANTICIPATES THAT THESE DEVELOPMENTS WILL EVENTUALLY EFFECT A TOTAL ACCEPTANCE OF NATIONAL LANGUAGES AS THE PRINCIPAL MEDIA OF INSTRUCTION IN EVERY COUNTRY, SUPPLEMENTED AT THE VARIOUS LEVELS BY VERNACULARS. IN HIGHER EDUCATION, IN MOST COUNTRIES, NATIONAL LANGUAGES WILL BE SUPPLEMENTED BY A WORLD LANGUAGE. THE AUTHOR FEELS THAT IT IS OBVIOUS ENGLISH WILL CONTINUE TO BE USED AS A TOOL OF RESEARCH AND FOR INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION. THE ASIAN INTELLECTUAL, WHO WISHES FIRST OF ALL TO EXPRESS HIMSELF IN HIS NATIVE LANGUAGE, HAS AT THE SAME TIME FOUND IN ENGLISH TODAY WHAT THE MEDIEVAL STUDENTS FOUND IN LATIN--A SOURCE OF WORLD LITERATURE AND AN AUDIENCE FOR HIS CREATIVE EXPRESSION. THIS PAPER WAS DELIVERED AT THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH CONFERENCE, HONOLULU, HAWAII, ON NOVEMBER 23, 1967. (AMM)

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ENGLISH AND THE INTERPRETATION OF THE ASIAN WORLD

(Address delivered by Dr. Carlos P. Romulo, Secretary of Education and concurrently President of the University of the Philippines, before the National Council of Teachers of English, Honolulu, Hawaii, November 23, 1967).

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Not long ago, in fact only September this year, the Honorable Minister of Education of India and formerly Vice-Chancellor of the Hindu University, Dr. Triguna Sen, was quoted by the New York Times as follows:

"I welcome that English which serves me as a window on the wall and helps me to enrich the languages of my country. But I have no use for English which alienates me from my own people, makes 98 per cent of my countrymen foreigners in their land of birth, and has become the status symbol of a privileged and exploiting class."

Today, ladies and gentlemen, at least a hundred and sixty thousand read yesterday's news in English in my country. In our school system, nearly three hundred thousand youths, from fifteen to twenty, sitting for their examinations in various college subjects, use the English language as their medium of expression. Just a few weeks ago, we held a national election in which, by my rough estimate, possibly half of the speeches and as many placards and billboards were in English. When a devastating tropical storm cut a swath across the country the week before the elections, the candidates' placards and billboards, an entire anthology of political slogans, littered the streets of Manila -- a symbolic reminder, perhaps, of the possibility that violent winds of history can dislodge our democracy and all that goes with it, including the freedom to use a non-native language in the making of political promises.

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Indeed, I dare not think in that direction. But there have been observable precedents -- Burma, for instance, for in that country, its national language -- Burmese, is already compulsory at the high school level and the use of Burmese in higher education has been going apace. Still, however, English is central to language problems that beset nearly all of the countries in our part of the world today.

Dr. Sen's remarks belong to this complex of issues, for India, as we know, has been for some years now beset by a language problem. The Constitution has specified that Hindi become its national language. Nevertheless, fifteen regional languages exist, and Hindi is understood by only 40 per cent of the people. To ease the fears of other regions, that the 40 per cent at least would not place them at a disadvantage, the government offered English as a compromise, giving this language an official status.

At the same time, the Tamils of Madras, to mention one case, are as nearly ready to adopt their own language for university instruction as are those partial to Hindi. The fear has been that the government would seek to impose Hindi as a second language and as the main instruction in the national institutes. It is against this background that we can understand Dr. Sen's statement.

There are 70 universities in his country, all of them already giving examinations in their regional languages. In 15 universities, more than 90 per cent have elected to take their examinations in their own languages. "Whether we like it or not," he said, "the replacement of English as a medium of instruction in the universities in our country is an inescapable and irreversible change that the

government can guide but not prevent."

India's population of 510 million makes the problem pressing and, therefore, well-worth reporting to the world. I can understand why the New York Times or its colleagues in the field, need not bother about similar situations that affect Malaysia, the Philippines, Hongkong, and other areas in our part of the world. Is the world press suggesting that what will happen to English in India may well happen elsewhere in our part of the world?

The proceedings that will be reported at this conference may well provide part of that answer. Meanwhile, let us look at the theme of this meeting a little more closely. And then let us match what insight we can draw with such declarations as Dr. Sen's, reflective as they are, of situations in which we are all a part.

Statistics about the press in Asia are deceiving. Two thousand two hundred newspapers in the region, we are told, attain a circulation of sixty-eight million. Actually, only a third of that circulation pertains to areas outside of Japan. According to Unesco estimates, the minimum standard for adequate dissemination of information, the minimum number of copies of daily papers, should be about 10 per cent of the population. Japan is the only country which meets this standard, with 43 copies per hundred.

But the English language occupies a unique position in the world of the Asian press. In the Philippines, it is the language used in the major newspapers. In Kuala Lumpus and Singapore, it is, of course, excelled by Chinese. Likewise, Urdu has a slight lean in Pakistan. Nevertheless, the middle class reads its news in English,

following perhaps a tradition of this language as the language of the educated classes in most countries with many vernaculars. On this point, E. Lloyd Sommerlad, Federal Director of the Federation of Australian Commercial Broadcasters and an authority on the press in developing countries, has remarked:

"To outside observers, it often appears that such papers depend too much on the foreign wire services, with disproportionate space devoted to international news and features. These may reflect reader interest, but is perhaps more likely to be a carry-over from the past, or simply to indicate that this is an easier Asian source of copy than gathering local news."

How shrewd this observation is can be seen in the performance of the Manila Times, whose 160,000 circulation represents eight times that of the nearest competing Tagalog daily. Outside of the fact that the Manila Times is read by the educated classes in the Philippines, it must obviously reflect the lives and aspirations of the entire population. It must, but no English language paper in Asia can -- nor tries! News gathering and publishing in the local language cannot compete with the extensive and efficient machinery of news gathering in the English language. Thus to feel that one knows the Philippines from a diligent study of its English language press, is a notion devotedly to be eschewed.

Translated in terms of other countries in Asia, this situation must be considered further in the light of the fact that only 13 per cent of Asia's population live in cities of over 100,000. Although this ratio has been increased in the past 30 years still something

like half of the urban population exhibit high rates of unemployment, dependency and a concentration of high level manpower. The interaction of these factors being thus material for news, it is these that are reflected in the press that serve the educated and the elite. In short, the English language offers but a limited window to our understanding of Asian societies.

Let us take education, an area, again, where English has been used as a medium of instruction as well as in research.

Today, our educational system in the Philippines is almost entirely carried on in the medium of English. Are we without any alternatives? Maybe our situation is not half as uncomfortable as that obtaining in India, but we could have had another alternative. Earlier, we could have adopted Tagalog completely. But the Tagalog language at the same time would have fragmented large sections of our population and obstructed efforts towards national unity. At the same time, the agitation for Tagalog continues, and what do we have? A growing illiteracy and a continually mixed-up language situation resulting in a high dropout and high unemployment ratio.

UNESCO has presented a picture of this problem elsewhere. Let us run through the facts as they affect specific countries. In Cambodia, which inherited an entire educational system based on the French model, we find higher education largely in French with some lectures in English, although Khmer, the national language, is replacing French in many official and social situations. English, however, is the first foreign language.

In Indonesia, which had Indonesian as official medium of instruction since 1945, English has become, however, the main language of wider communication and is a compulsory subject throughout the six years of the educational system, rapidly substituting Dutch and is basically used for research.

In Laos, where Khmer-Meo and Tiechiu, Vietnamese, and Yao are important minority languages, French is used in higher education by some 80 per cent.

In Malaysia and Singapore, English is next to Malay as an inter-ethnic medium of communication, while, indeed, the university education in Malaysia is still in English, although this year, the emphasis has changed to Malay. The Tengku, at the first convocation of the University of Malaysia held in their national language in 1964 said, speaking on the policy of establishing Malay as the sole national language: "This policy should not interfere with the education of the university or the language used to provide such education." Thus, the possibility of English and Chinese continuing in their present status remains strong.

In Thailand, English as a research language has become more important, although pre-university teaching in English, we are told, deserves improvement.

In Vietnam, both French and English are required in some types of schools, English, however, is used in private study alongside French.

Language Projections

UNESCO, it must be pointed out, however, does not list English as the language used in religion, classical literature, modern literature and technology for many of the South-East Asian countries. Although English in the Philippines, Laos and Cambodia is used as a world language, it is, however, recognized that translation of material in English in the native text is well-nigh impossible. Hence, generally speaking, world language study in pre-university schooling even in those countries which have adopted the national language medium throughout, is a widely recognized necessity. And because a student cannot do this late in his career, his study of English as a world language is merely a failure of language teaching. This fact, patent though it is, has served many purposes -- for example, as a favorite excuse for lack of vitality, even for a dearth of creativity in many levels.

UNESCO's projection of language development in Asia anticipates a steady and firm emphasis of national languages, with secondary interests in the world language -- this being, generally speaking, English. Mandarin will have complete representation in every country, but the total number of users will be comparatively small, and political factors are obviously against its development even as a regional lingua franca. English, as the strongest candidate for regional inter-communication, will, by 1980 have a much strengthened position by virtue of its general adoptability and due to the existence of abundant literature.

UNESCO anticipates that these developments will eventually effect a total acceptance of national languages as the principal

media of instruction in every country, supplemented at the various levels by vernaculars. In higher education, in most countries, national languages will be supplemented by a world language. It seems obvious that English "will continue to be used as research tools and for international communication."

Interpreting Asia

It is perhaps safe to say that the voice of Asia, in so far as it is the West that is listening, can be honestly heard in English. Colonialism's language of administration has become a language of thought.

It might very well be this: "I, too, have no use for English in so far as my deepest needs are concerned. But this language has been given us to learn, and now I must use it as a tool with which to help forge a world of brotherhood and understanding." The energy that the Asian mind has spent to bring this about has not been inconsiderable. Quite literally, we have spent in the Philippines for years on end one third of our national income in an educational system based on English as a medium of instruction; yet we are not too happy about having produced this or that thoughtful generation. The secondary position which, of necessity, English must take may have been in itself an obstacle. To it must be added the reserve and the sense of temporariness with which any program in the use of language must be pursued. Also, there is an embarrassment inherent in using a foreign language with which to express the thoughts and sentiments of a new nation, and many political implications have been drawn from that fact. The situation in most countries, the Philippines included, has

prepared the ground for cultural dependence, making inadequate the political independence already attained. The situation has furthermore aroused cultural aspirations which our economy cannot sustain. This is true of the Philippines, and can be observed in other parts of Asia, excluding quite naturally -- Japan. What the Asian wishes to achieve is a contemporaniety and an urgency of expression preferably in his native tongue. With the dismantling colonial establishment in Asia, that desire has become more keen, yet the chances of fulfilling it have become less and less favorable. I have pointed out earlier how English has stood in the ongoing programs of the various educational systems in Asia. The trend has been, easily, towards more and more use of English for more serious writing and thought, yet without prejudice to the development of the national language and the enlargement of its literature. The embarrassments notwithstanding. Time alone will justify it, the Indian novelist Rajah Rao has remarked in this connection. The fact is that the Asian intellect has perhaps found in English today what the medieval students found in Latin.

There is nothing unusual here, or merely expedient. We must see deeper forces at work, as, for instance, the powers of literature and the expressive forms. The Asian intellectual feels he must have access to the world's thought and, to survive, in bulk; and in language within his reach is the English of world literature, both an original and in translation. In certain cases, the translations themselves like the books of Thomas Mann, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky, have their own integrity in this new text. Having drank from this fountain of knowledge, the Asian intellectual is confronted with the alternative

of expression in his native tongue as against expression in a world language. Specific challenges in the use of the world language draws the best in him. The competitive quality of scholarship in English challenges his creativity to its fullest. Is it unusual that, therefore, he must seek an audience?

For he has a special message for the world. He has someting to say about his cultural and historical experiences under regimes past and present. He wants to put into form his brooding over his nation's past, present and future. He seeks to assert his personality and strives for recognition in that competitive area, the intellect, where no color lines can be successfully drawn and where economic disadvantages can perhaps only have a marginal effect. In short, he has something to tell the world.